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5 March 1973

NSSM 169

A: (February 24th Work Plan)

Basic National Policy

Synopsis. The attached paper provides a comparison of U.S. Nuclear Employment Policy statements contained in NSDM 16, the President's Foreign Policy Reports, Defense Policy and Planning Guidance, the JSOP, the Current NSTAP, the Proposed NSTAP and MC 14/3.

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by R. Soubers, National Security Council

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B. (February 24th Work Plan)

Existing Nuclear Policy

This paper describes U.S. Nuclear Policy in terms of the broad objectives, the action policy, and declaratory statements of policy. Current action policy is further discussed in terms of employment policy, weapons system acquisition policy, and arms control aspects.

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### EXISTING U.S. NUCLEAR POLICY

US nuclear policy consists of those general and specific guidelines established or approved by US civilian authorities, primarily the President and the Secretary of Defense, which govern US strategic and theater nuclear posture, and the necessary implementing guidelines and instructions to effect this posture.

US nuclear policy provides both broad and specific guidelines for planning of nuclear programs, budgets, and operations, and for the planning of related activities by all appropriate agencies of the US Government. Policy statements are a major means by which the President and the Secretary of Defense control the overall direction and general content of nuclear programs, ensure consistency among foreign policy and nuclear programs, and inform the US public and other nations about the purpose and content of the US nuclear posture.

A more precise definition of "nuclear policy" is not practical. We can, however, identify the major functional elements of nuclear policy and their interrelationships. These are broad policy objectives, the action policy which provides links between the broad objectives and specific programs and forces, and declaratory statements of policy which inform friends and potential opponents about various aspects of US nuclear policy.

The Broad Objectives of US nuclear policy derive from broad national objectives, are established by the President, appear in various places in the annual foreign policy reports of the President, and in general, tend to change slowly over time.

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Action policy for nuclear forces consists of four major elements:

1. Nuclear weapons employment policy, governing the targeting and actual employment of nuclear weapons.
2. Nuclear weapons deployment policy, governing the forward deployment of nuclear weapons and their delivery vehicles outside the United States.
3. Weapon systems acquisition policy, governing the development and procurement of weapon systems.
4. Nuclear arms control policy, governing the objectives and strategy for negotiating controls on nuclear armaments.

Declaratory statements of policy consist of unclassified and classified statements made about broad policy objectives, action policy, and the programs and budgets which support these policies. Examples include the President's Annual Foreign Policy Report, the Annual Report of the Secretary of Defense to Congress, other Congressional testimony, and statements made to NATO.

#### Current Nuclear Policy

Current US nuclear policy is set forth in a variety of documents, including National Security Decision Memoranda (NSDMs), the President's annual foreign policy reports, the annual reports of the Secretary of Defense to Congress, the Defense Policy and Planning Guidance, the National Strategic Targeting and Attack Policy (NSTAP), and various statements to NATO. Some NATO planning documents (e.g., MC 14/3) also are related to current US nuclear policy.

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Current policy, in brief, calls for the acquisition of strategic nuclear weapon systems to support a well-hedged urban/industrial retaliatory capability, a general nuclear war plan with a small number of large, preplanned attack options which emphasize counterforce operations, and the maintenance of a stable strategic relationship with the Soviet Union through negotiations. Declaratory statements of policy stress strategic sufficiency and sufficiency criteria, the US second-strike capability against Soviet cities, and flexibility in employing nuclear forces. Actual counterforce capability and the role of counter-force operations in current employment policy are, however, substantial. Theater nuclear policy as expressed in the Defense Policy and Planning Guidance (DPPG) calls for forces to deter theater nuclear attacks and help deter conventional attacks. The DPPG states that the primary deterrent to Soviet and PRC conventional attacks is US and allied conventional forces. However, NATO policy documents state inter alia that there should be options for "early defensive use" of nuclear weapons by NATO in the event a PACT conventional attack cannot be contained conventionally.

Broad Policy Objectives

Current broad objectives, which have been framed by this Administration in various policy documents, can be summarized as follows:

1. Deter nuclear attacks against the United States, its forces, and its bases overseas and help deter attacks by nuclear powers against US allies and those other nations whose survival is vital to US security.
2. Prevent coercion of the United States by nuclear powers and help prevent coercion of US allies by such powers.

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3. Contribute to the deterrence of conventional attacks on US allies.

4. If deterrence fails, limit damage to the United States and its allies and assure a continued US position of power and influence, to the extent practicable.

5. Maintain strategic stability with the Soviet Union through a sufficiency of strategic forces.

6. Seek to maintain security and the effectiveness of nuclear forces through negotiation of equitable arms agreements with the Soviet Union.

Action Policy

Employment Policy. Current US policy for the employment of strategic and designated theater nuclear forces is currently contained in the NSTAP, which is discussed in the Panel's report of May 5, 1972 and summarized here. The NSTAP states as the objective in a general nuclear war the conduct of nuclear offensive operations against the Soviet Union, alone or in combination with its allies, "as required to terminate hostilities on terms advantageous to the United States." To achieve this objective, three tasks are set for US forces:

-- "To destroy or neutralize, on a selective basis, nuclear offensive capabilities of the enemy that threaten the United States and its allies, in order to limit damage to the United States and its allies to the maximum extent practicable.

-- To destroy or neutralize, on a selective basis, a comprehensive enemy military target system in order to assist in the destruction of the enemy's overall military capability.

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contingency plans. Many studies have been conducted regarding the roles and effectiveness of these weapons, but in recent years, there has been little significant change in either size or composition of nuclear weapon deployments.

Weapon Systems Acquisition Policy. NSDM 16, issued on June 24, 1969, primarily addresses strategic weapon systems acquisition. This document defines strategic sufficiency, insofar as attacks on the United States are concerned, as follows:

"1. Maintain high confidence that our second strike capability is sufficient to deter an all-out surprise attack on our strategic forces.

2. Maintain forces to insure that the Soviet Union would have no incentive to strike the United States first in a crisis.

3. Maintain the capability to deny the Soviet Union the ability to cause significantly more deaths and industrial damage in the United States in a nuclear war than they themselves would suffer.

4. Deploy defenses which limit damage from small attacks or accidental launches to a low level."

This document stated that, pending further studies, the above criteria should be used by all agencies in considering issues related to the US strategic posture.

With the exception of NSDM's on SALT, NSDM 16 is the only Presidential guidance on strategic force planning in the form of a National Security Decision Memorandum. But many areas of strategic force planning are not explicitly addressed by NSDM 16, including broad policy objectives and the relation among weapon systems acquisition policy and the other elements of action policy.

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Moreover, serious questions have been raised about each of the four sufficiency criteria of NSDM 16. The first is ambiguous about the retaliatory target system and objectives. The second criterion is subject to differing interpretations which have not been resolved. The third criterion cannot be achieved insofar as Soviet fatalities are concerned, if the Soviets could effectively evacuate their cities and tends to lose significance or relevance at very high fatality levels; furthermore, targeting to satisfy the third criterion would conflict with other goals for nuclear war plans which would have priority over urban/industrial attacks. The fourth criterion requires revision to reflect the ABM Treaty, since it is not an attainable goal under the provisions of that treaty.

The unclassified foreign policy reports of the President supplement NSDM 16 in several respects by requiring that:

- US strategic forces not have the size, characteristics, or deployments which can reasonably be interpreted by the Soviet Union as being intended to threaten a disarming attack.
- The mix of strategic offensive forces continue to be reviewed in light of changing threats and technology to ensure that we have the best possible mix to meet the requirements of sufficiency.
- The United States must have forces and procedures that provide alternatives appropriate to the nature and the level of the provocation. The 1971 Foreign Policy Report goes on to say that "this

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means having the plans and command and control capabilities necessary to enable us to select and carry out the appropriate responses without necessarily having to resort to mass destruction."

Although studies have been conducted, no National Security Decision Memorandum has been issued with respect to nuclear forces other than strategic. In each of the President's foreign policy reports, theater nuclear weapons have been discussed, but primarily in the context of issues and questions regarding the role of these weapons in US and allied postures. However, the foreign policy reports have stated that in the event of simultaneous conflict in both Europe and Asia, the United States should not plan on meeting such an attack primarily with US conventional forces, thereby implying some type of nuclear operations in response.

Arms Control Aspects. The President, in his foreign policy reports, has made clear that the United States is committed to seeking a stable strategic relationship with the Soviet Union, through negotiations, if possible. US proposals and positions in the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) have been consistent with our current weapon systems acquisition policy in the sense of seeking to preserve a well-hedged urban/industrial retaliatory capability. To date, employment policy does not appear to have been a major consideration in formulating these proposals and positions.

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Declaratory Statements

Recent reports and declaratory statements regarding US nuclear policy discuss primarily weapon systems acquisition policy and arms control goals. They have generally conveyed the impression of US determination to maintain both the appearance and the fact of a well-hedged second strike capability against Soviet cities. They have also conveyed the impression that US missiles have little counterforce capability. These statements have not in general mentioned planning for the employment of nuclear weapons, except for comments about the need for flexibility.

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C. (February 24th Work Plan)

Defense Proposed Policy

Attachment 1 is a summary of the Proposed Policy Guidance for the Employment of Nuclear Weapons.

Attachment 2 compares the current National Strategic Targeting and Attack Policy with the Proposed Revised Tentative Policy Guidance for the Employment of Nuclear Weapons.

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1. Current Environment Conditioning the Employment of Nuclear Weapons

- Many factors condition the ways in which nuclear weapons can be most effectively employed to achieve U.S. objectives. These include the nuclear forces deployed by the United States, the Soviet Union, and the PRC; the distribution of population and industry in each of these nations; and the Soviet and PRC doctrines for employment of nuclear weapons.

a. Nuclear Forces of the United States, the Soviet Union, and the PRC

(1) In an all-out nuclear war with the Soviet Union, U.S. counterforce strikes cannot provide high confidence in significantly reducing the urban damage the United States and its allies would suffer, even if the United States initiated the nuclear conflict. This is because (a) the Soviets now have a secure second-strike force with SLBMs at sea and ICBMs in hardened and dispersed silos and (b) there is the possibility that the Soviets might launch their land-based ballistic missiles on tactical warning of an attack. This indicates that U.S. nuclear weapon employment plans should provide options for limiting the level and extent of a nuclear war with the Soviet Union as a primary means to limit damage to the United States and its allies. Because the success of efforts to control escalation of a nuclear conflict depends on the actions of all parties to the conflict and, therefore, is highly uncertain, there should also be options for damage limiting counterforce attacks.

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(2) Currently, the PRC does not have the capability to significantly threaten the United States. Counterforce operations against the PRC nuclear threats to the United States, when deployed, could significantly reduce, but probably not deny, damage from a Chinese attack. With respect to protecting our Asian allies and our forces overseas, however, there are major uncertainties about the effectiveness of counterforce strikes in limiting damage. These uncertainties arise because of the possibility that the United States may not be able to locate all PRC nuclear forces for targeting purposes.

b. Distribution of Population and Industry

(1) Asymmetries in population distribution have a bearing on the effectiveness of U.S. targeting and the consequence of attack. The U.S. population is more concentrated in cities than is the Soviet population, but the distribution of industry in cities is about the same for both countries.

(2) The Soviets have plans and organizations for partial evacuation of their cities in the event of a threatened nuclear attack. If such urban evacuation were effectively carried out, Soviet deaths in a nuclear attack could be reduced significantly. There would, however, be no reduction in the amount of Soviet industry destroyed. The Soviet capability to effectively implement their evacuation plans has never been tested in other than command post exercises and, hence, is uncertain.

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c. Soviet and PRC Nuclear Warfare Doctrine

(1) There is major uncertainty as to the nuclear warfare doctrine of the Soviet Union and the PRC. However, in considering available documentary evidence, it was found that both the Soviet classified documents and public statements of their leaders suggest that they may have a doctrine for launching retaliatory nuclear strikes upon receipt of tactical warning of a nuclear attack on the USSR. On the other hand, such a doctrine does not appear to be consistent with trends in the Soviet nuclear force posture toward increased pre-launch survivability which would enable those forces to ride out an attack.

(2) Frequent Soviet statements in the open and classified literature, as well as Soviet military exercises and many characteristics of the Soviet nuclear force posture, suggest that the first, limited use of nuclear weapons by NATO would be met by a massive Soviet nuclear attack on Europe. These statements and exercises are, however, always found in the context of NATO aggression against the Warsaw Pact. It is not clear that a massive Soviet nuclear attack on Europe or the United States would be a probable Soviet reaction in the event of limited nuclear attacks by NATO for the purpose of repelling Warsaw Pact aggression.

(3) Less is known about the PRC nuclear doctrine than about Soviet nuclear doctrine, in part, because of the comparatively recent emergence of a PRC nuclear weapon capability.

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2. Issues Addressed in Formulating Nuclear Employment Policy

In addressing the problem of employment of nuclear weapons, numerous issues were identified and studied. The more important of these issues are outlined below in order to give some insight into the rationale behind the proposed employment policy. For each of these issues, the statement in the proposed employment policy is outlined, alternatives considered are reviewed and the rationale for the position that was taken is outlined.

a. Basic Objectives. What should be the strategy and basic objectives in conducting nuclear warfare?

The proposed employment policy recognizes that United States strategy is, first, to deter war and goes on to state that this is best accomplished by emphasis on the threat of destruction of enemy political and military control apparatus, enemy military forces and enemy industrial base necessary to support military operations. If deterrence has failed to the point that a moderate level of nuclear conflict occurs, the basic objectives proposed are the control of escalation of the intensity of the war and an inducement of an early end to the war at the lowest level consistent with preserving U.S. vital interests. If warfare has reached a level where control of escalation becomes meaningless, then the proposed objective changes to the securing of the best possible post-war political, economic and military position for the United States and its allies by inflicting damage on the enemy and limiting damage to ourselves and allies.

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Based on Soviet statements about nuclear strategy, supported by the political, economic, and military trends observed in the Soviet Union, it appears that Soviet attacks and coercion would be deterred less by threatening population than by threatening the destruction of the Communist party structure, Soviet command and control, Soviet military forces, the immediate logistic support for such forces, and the production base to generate more forces. Because of the nature of nuclear weapon effects and the co-location and co-mingling of Soviet urban population with the specific political, economic and military targets just described, it is recognized that attacks on these targets will, unavoidably, result in substantial fatalities in the Soviet population as a whole. Nevertheless, it is important to distinguish clearly between these objective targets and the Soviet population base as such.

It appears that deterrence of PRC attacks and coercion can also best be achieved by threatening destruction of the Communist party structure, military forces, the means by which the leadership controls those forces and the production base which supports those forces.

The only alternative seriously considered was to rely exclusively on options to attack the enemy offensive capability for the purpose of limiting damage to the U.S. and its allies. This approach was rejected because of its dubious effectiveness and strong potential for escalation under some circumstances.

b. Damaging the Soviet Union and PRC. It attacks to inflict damage on the Soviet Union and PRC, what priority should be given to:  
(1) destroying government, (2) killing people, (3) destroying the war-

supporting industry, (4) prolonging post-attack economic recovery, and (5) attacking military power that helps rule the country and threatens the United States and its allies?

The proposed employment policy states that if war has escalated to a high intensity inconsistent with control of escalation, the destruction of government and military that rules the country, the nuclear and general purpose military structure that threatens the U.S. and its allies, the war-supporting industry, and other targets necessary for post-attack recovery are all important objectives. The killing of people per se is not considered to be an objective although significant fatalities will result on a collateral basis from some of the above attacks.

The proposed employment policy provides that the same general criteria apply to the PRC as the Soviet Union. The PRC poses no massive threat to the U.S. in the next decade or so. However, the proposed employment policy allows for options intended to negate the Chinese threat to its neighbors. The use of some SIOP committed forces to such a task is permitted since it is doubtful this can be accomplished with theater nuclear weapons alone.

The policy also specifies that attacks against the PRC should be separated totally in terms of targeting from attacks on the Soviet Union and that options should be provided to withhold overflight of the Soviet Union. Full constraint on overflight would impact

adversely on efficient force application considerations.

Furthermore, if we were engaged simultaneously in war with the PRC and the Soviet Union, there would be no need for a restriction on overflight.

The major alternative involves placing greater emphasis on killing people. Although the capability to cause Soviet deaths has become a common indicator of strategic force effectiveness used by some U.S. analysts, it was concluded that the killing of people per se should not be a major U.S. objective in the event of all-out nuclear war for the following reasons:

(1) A heavy emphasis on targeting to kill people would shift warheads away from government and military controls, military forces, and targets key to post-attack recovery. This shift would detract from the relative post-war position of the United States in the event of all-out nuclear war and this prospect, in turn, would also weaken the coercive effect of withheld attacks in efforts to control escalation.

(2) The possibility of successful evacuation of Soviet cities implies that the killing of a specified number of people cannot be assured.

(3) The Soviet and PRC leadership may have a higher tolerance for casualties than perceived by the United States.

c. Control of Escalation. To what extent should nuclear weapon employment plans provide options intended for the control of escalation?

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As stated above, the proposed employment policy makes a major departure from previous targeting and attack policy by introducing the concept of controlling the escalation of nuclear conflict as a means of limiting damage to the United States and its allies. This concept is implemented by specifying a number of attack options which are intended to provide the National Command Authorities with the ability to conduct nuclear war within clearly defined boundaries (escalation boundaries) for the purpose of signalling to the enemy U.S. willingness to keep the war limited. Some options for attacking targets highly valued by the enemy leadership, when selectively withheld and perceived as threats by the enemy, are also intended to deter further enemy escalation and coerce him into negotiating a termination of the war on terms acceptable to the United States.

## Subsidiary Issues

- Is there any real prospect that escalation can be controlled once a nuclear war has started?
- Is it realistic to preplan specific attack options for use in limited nuclear war, considering the many uncertainties concerning the circumstances in which a nuclear war might occur?
- Would provision of attack options for use in limited nuclear war significantly reduce the effectiveness of the Major Attack Option in security a relatively favorable post-attack position for the United States and its allies?

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(1) Can Escalation Be Controlled? The ability of the United States to control the escalation of a nuclear war will depend strongly on the real objectives of the enemy, the risks and losses that the enemy is prepared to take, and the ability of the enemy leadership to discern U.S. objectives, commitments, capabilities and willingness to limit the conflict. These factors are, of course, unpredictable in advance of a conflict and may not be clear to the National Command Authorities at the time of a conflict. Soviet doctrine, military exercises, and nuclear force posture suggests that they may have made inadequate plans and may have unsuitable forces with which to engage in limited nuclear war. On the other hand, there are circumstances where it would be in the Soviet's best interest to keep the conflict limited. This, together with the Soviet's past propensity to avoid unnecessary risks in crisis situations, suggests that the Soviet Union may well elect to keep a nuclear conflict limited.

In view of these uncertainties, it was concluded that, if a nuclear conflict started on a limited scale, a promising means of reducing damage to the United States and its allies, while protecting U.S. vital interests, would be to seek to control escalation and induce an early termination to the war. Accordingly, attack options for this purpose are provided in the proposed employment policy.

(2) Can Attack Options be Preplanned for Control of Escalation? There are many uncertainties about the circumstances of a nuclear war which indicate that attack options designed for controlling

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escalation may need to be tailored at the time they are considered by the National Command Authorities for execution. These uncertainties include the nature of any tacit or explicit understandings about rules of engagement which may emerge between the United States and the Soviet Union as the crisis builds up, the nature of the specific issues of the conflict, the specific U.S. political and military objectives in the conflict, and new information about Soviet doctrines and the effectiveness of U.S. and Soviet weapon systems which may become apparent during the conflict.

Without prior preparation, it could take days or weeks to plan, evaluate, and implement attack options, depending on the size of the attack, whereas the National Command Authorities may need such options in a matter of minutes or hours. Accordingly, nuclear war plans and procedures should provide as many preplanned attack options as possible consistent with the capabilities of current and near term U.S. forces and command and control and with the need for Major Attack Options designed to secure the best possible post-war position for the United States and its allies in the event that escalation cannot be controlled.

(3) Would Provision of Many Attack Options Significantly Degrade U.S. Military Capabilities for All-Out Nuclear War? Options for limited nuclear strikes which involve incremental execution of forces can reduce the effectiveness of U.S. nuclear forces for securing a relatively favorable post-war position for the United States and its allies to the extent that:

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- vehicles carrying several warheads (bombers and MIRVed missiles) cannot be allocated optimally if each vehicle is constrained to attack either too few or too widely dispersed targets.
- attacks must be conducted piecemeal and the forces cannot take advantage of a coordinated, large attack to penetrate defenses;
- withheld forces and their command and control face destruction by enemy follow-on attacks;
- procedures for incremental execution of forces are more complicated than those for executing Major Attack Options, leading to delay and confusion.

For these reasons, it was felt important to specify the objectives and guidelines for attack options in some detail. The objectives and guidelines specified in the proposed employment policy represent a reasonable balance between efforts to control escalation and military requirements if these efforts are not successful. It was recognized, however, that an iterative process, probably with modification, addition, or deletion of specific attack options, will be needed before there can be assurance that the best balance has in fact been achieved.

d. The Role of Strategic Forces in Theater Conflicts. Should the employment policy address both the SIOP committed forces and the theater nuclear forces? If so, what support from SIOP forces is appropriate in theater nuclear conflicts? How does this differ between

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NATO and the Pacific?

The proposed employment policy applies equally to strategic and theater nuclear forces. By specifying objectives and guidelines for employment, but by not specifying the forces to be used in each case, it does provide, intentionally, for use of SIOP committed forces in theater nuclear conflicts. For example, it provides for selective attack on the MR/IRBM launchers and medium bomber bases that threaten our European allies. The general intent of the policy is to display no difference in the role of SIOP committed forces relative to theater nuclear forces in Europe and in Asia. However, options which support European theater conflicts are different from those supporting Asian theater conflicts because of the lower capability of the PRC as compared to the Soviet Union and because of the NATO coordination requirements.

The alternative is not to use SIOP committed forces in theater nuclear conflicts. Considering the limited range of theater nuclear forces and the large Soviet force of MR/IRBMs and medium bombers threatening NATO forces, it appears impractical to counter this threat with theater forces alone. If the Soviets were successful in a limited nuclear conflict in Europe, we could lose Europe to them if we were not willing to commit SIOP forces in support of NATO. If NATO forces were successful in a limited nuclear conflict, the MR/IRBMs and bombers could escalate the level of conflict and hold European countries at risk unless the SIOP committed forces were able to counter the threat.

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Similarly, in the case of the PRC, it appears impractical to cover fully PRC targets with the use of theater nuclear weapons alone.

e. Reserve Force. To what extent should we maintain a reserve or swing force, i.e., one in addition to withheld forces? How large and retargetable should this force be and what targets, if any, should be assigned to it on a pre-planned basis?

The proposed employment policy specifies a swing force in the reserve in addition to forces withheld from execution and that portion of our strategic forces which can be generated to alert status or re-constituted from previous missions. The purpose of the swing force is twofold: First, to provide, in addition to any forces which may be withheld, a reserve with high enduring survivability to prevent post-attack nuclear coercion and a reserve to increase the effectiveness of attacks by use of strike assessment information. Second, to provide a capability for use in Limited Nuclear Options and a capability to augment Selected Attack Options, if, in attempting to control escalation, additional weight of effort on a Selected Attack Option is desired at the time of execution.

The size and composition of the swing force to meet the objective set forth for it remains to be determined. It, however, should be retargetable because of the requirements that may be placed on it by the NCA.

The alternative of not having a swing force either precludes the implementation of any ad hoc requirements on targeting or requires that

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ad hoc needs be taken from the pre-planned assignments which, without prior planning, would tend to reduce the efficiency of the SIOP in subsequent tasks to an unknown degree. No consideration was given to foregoing implementation, by some technique, of ad hoc requirements which may be generated by the NCA.

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E: (February 24th Work Plan)

Supporting Assumptions

This section summarizes 1) the current environment conditioning the employment of nuclear weapons and 2) the issues which were addressed in formulating nuclear employment policy.\* Together they represent the supporting assumptions. Part 1, the Current Environment, includes facts, judgments and uncertainties regarding major factors which condition ways in which nuclear weapons can be most effectively employed to achieve U.S. objectives. Part 2 provides a statement of the issues addressed and the rationale for their resolution and subsequent incorporation into the proposed employment policy.

\* Sections 2 and 7, Review of U.S. Policy for the Employment of Nuclear Weapons, 5 May 1973

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